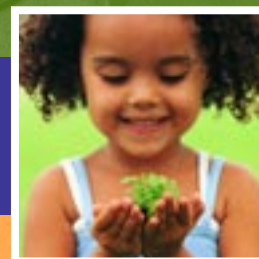
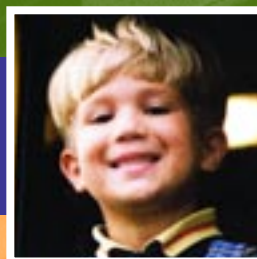


# **CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAPS:**

## **REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO PRESCHOOL IN CONNECTICUT**



**A REPORT OF THE  
CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

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CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**NOVEMBER 2003**



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The State Department of Education expresses its appreciation to the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut for facilitating the process that enabled the various preschool and early care stakeholders to present perspectives that informed the vision and goals expressed in this report.

The Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote and maximize the physical, behavioral, emotional, cognitive and social development of children throughout Connecticut. It is a subsidiary of the Children's Fund of Connecticut, a public charitable foundation. CHDI's efforts are to maximize the effectiveness of institutions and systems directly affecting the health and development of Connecticut's children.

## INTRODUCTION



According to the National Research Council study *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers* (2000), “(There is) an emerging consensus among professionals, and, to an ever greater extent among parents, that young children should be provided with educational experiences.” The report also states that a second trend is driving this interest in early childhood education: “... the accumulation of convincing evidence from research that young children are more capable learners than current practices reflect, and that good educational experiences in the preschool years can have a positive impact on school learning.”

This growing research base on the importance of preschool experiences, coupled with the new demands of federal legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, has prompted national attention to early childhood education not seen in the past, and a new recognition of the impact of early learning on later achievement and success, both in school and in life. Further, *Connecticut’s Blueprint for Reading Achievement* and the *Report of the Early Reading Success Panel*, 2000, state that “Oral-language competencies form an essential foundation for learning to read and write. Much of this foundation develops during the preschool years.”

Language development is a key feature of quality preschool programs. Programs that capitalize on children’s built-in, natural interests for exploration directly enhance their language, cognitive and social-emotional growth. Preschool experiences using play-based learning centers and project theme approaches foster children’s experimentation, interests, interaction with other children, action, movement, observation and repetition of success. Play-based experiences foster children’s mental processes in that these opportunities help children to look for facts, predict what comes next and remember details. As children talk during these learning experiences and the teacher responds to their explanations and questions, children’s language skills are extended and their vocabulary becomes enriched.

The Connecticut State Board of Education believes that all children should have the experiences and opportunities that are necessary for them to achieve in school, and therefore supports the goal of providing all of Connecticut’s children with a preschool experience. The State Department of Education is encouraged to form partnerships with families, communities and state and local policymakers to accomplish this goal.



## THE VISION

By the end of the decade, all children in the State of Connecticut will have high-quality preschool services available to them, beginning at age 3. These services will promote the educational, social, emotional, artistic/aesthetic and physical health needs of every child, with the goal that all children in Connecticut will enter school succeeding and eager to build on their preschool success.

## TAKING ACTION

In recognition of the significant role preschool plays in developing competent learners and closing the achievement gaps among Connecticut's student groups, the Connecticut State Board of Education has decided to move forward toward reaching the goal of making preschool accessible to children and affordable for families.

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*"The Connecticut State Board of Education is committed to ensuring that all of the state's preschool-age children, including children with disabilities, are afforded an opportunity to participate in a high-quality preschool education."*

State Board of Education Position Statement on Preschool Programs and Services  
September 11, 2002

*"The early childhood (school readiness or preschool) state grant should be increased by approximately 10 percent a year for the next 10 years with the long-term goal of providing universal access to high-quality preschool based on parent and community ability to pay."*

Connecticut State Board of Education  
January 16, 2003

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The recommendations contained in this report propose a course of action for improving access and preschool services for all of Connecticut's children by putting into place a coordinated, affordable and effective early childhood education system — one that envisions high-quality preschool programs in a variety of settings.

The State Department of Education intends to take the appropriate next steps to foster necessary public education and support for increasing preschool capacity in communities and sharing the cost of service, where necessary, so that it is available to all students.

An appropriate policymaking process will be engaged over time to implement The Vision.



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



### RECOMMENDATION 1

Encourage the existing K-12 educational system in Connecticut to include voluntary preschool programs for children, starting at age 3, for a minimum of 2½ hours per day for at least 180 days per year. This includes:

- providing subsidies where necessary to establish and support preschool tuition and costs, and to enhance the learning/teaching capability within programs;
- providing incentives for public schools to assume a preschool leadership role and increased responsibility to provide preschool and support services in schools and community-based programs, when needed;
- including children with disabilities in the state preschool system, prioritizing participation and services to children and families eligible for Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA);
- establishing policies that will transcend current funding barriers and service constraints, such as permitting preschool to be delivered in towns where parents work, in addition to where the child lives, and making preschool programs priority components of elementary magnet schools, especially in Priority and Severe-Need School Districts;
- establishing common early learning expectations for all children, and disseminating to all public and private providers benchmarks and materials to record child performance; and
- encouraging coordinated, system-oriented processes in communities with enhanced public school leadership. Some examples are single-point-of-entry mechanisms, unified data collection, reporting of student progress and coordination of student/family support services.



## RECOMMENDATION 2

Assist low-income families so that all children have an equal opportunity to attend preschool and access to the array of support services needed by them and their families.

- The State Department of Education should provide leadership in the area of coordinated preschool education services to other state agencies serving children and families. This leadership should foster interagency investment in an overall system that includes establishing and supporting the development of highly qualified professionals; permanent, convenient facilities in schools and community settings; and year-round programming that meets child and family needs.
- Collaborative partnerships should encourage ancillary child and family support services, such as child health and literacy services, the General Educational Development (GED) diploma, English as a Second Language programs, parent involvement and family self-sufficiency. Programs should embrace the School Readiness and Head Start models of providing on-site services or referring families to needed services not provided by the preschool program.
- The State Department of Education should encourage and give incentives to coordinate preschool education services with child-care services.

**RECOMMENDATION 3**

Provide adequate funding for quality preschool programs and related activities. The State Department of Education (SDE) should:

- expect families to contribute to the cost of services based on their ability to pay. SDE must establish or delegate to local education agencies (LEAs) the responsibility to implement fair parent contribution scales;
- maintain and, where necessary, increase funding for comprehensive programs like School Readiness and Head Start for families and children in need of such services;
- fund mechanisms to sensitively measure and report student outcomes consistent with established age-appropriate expectations;
- encourage the development of a partnership among the business, philanthropic and public sectors to pool human and financial resources focused on improving the early care and education system;
- encourage expanded facility development and/or renovation by increasing available debt service financing commitments as currently administered by the Connecticut Health and Education Finance Authority's Child Care Facilities Loan Fund options to meet up to 40 percent of the permanent facility needs in communities by 2012. Include the capacity to renovate existing facilities;
- increase the State Department of Education school construction bonus in the School Readiness legislation to encourage preschool facility construction in public schools by 2012 that will accommodate 60 percent of the preschool population;
- extend SDE-funded magnet school opportunities to include preschool; and
- encourage memorandums of agreement between local public schools and community providers to enable state Education Cost Sharing Grant reimbursement for preschool education delivered on behalf of the school district by qualified providers at community sites or in public school facilities.





**RECOMMENDATION 4**

Develop and maintain an early childhood education career development system that will increase the number of individuals with an early childhood teacher certification. The State Department of Education (SDE) should:

- support a budget option in the Connecticut State Department of Higher Education that will, through 2012, reduce tuition and costs for persons seeking an early childhood endorsement;
- support articulation between the two-year and four-year teacher preparation programs so that an individual will experience a seamless transition between Connecticut colleges in attaining an early childhood teaching endorsement; and
- recruit and retain a high-quality workforce that meets professional credentialing standards. SDE should also collaborate with higher education and the Connecticut philanthropic community to fund the development of an adequate workforce at both the professional and paraprofessional levels.



## BACKGROUND



As the education community and preschool education advocates continue to seek resolution to the many issues related to preschool access in Connecticut, it is important to acknowledge that most preschool-age children in Connecticut (75%) already attend preschool due largely to high enrollment in more affluent Connecticut towns. The early learning and stimulation that these children receive in preschool contribute to the high standing that our state enjoys when compared to student achievement in other states. In communities where preschool services are not generally available, the children who attend preschool perform better than their community peers who do not.

Connecticut owes much to the preschool programs that, over the past 35 years, have served communities where families could not afford the escalating cost of quality preschool education. Head Start and the statewide array of day-care centers funded by the Department of Social Services are the pioneers of publicly funded preschool. They have largely shouldered the burden of providing educational services in the context of child care which encourages and supports family self-sufficiency. In the last decade, “reverse mainstream” programs for preschool children with disabilities and School Readiness Grant programs in public schools have expanded access to more children and bolstered quality in participating programs across the state.

The drive toward greater access continues to have positive effects on existing preschool services and their providers. There is an expectation that high-quality programming will be generalized across all programs. New relationships among community providers and local public schools will promote continuity in curriculum and foster accountability. The ability of families to choose from a variety of programs that meet their needs is essential to developing an affordable, accessible and flexible system of preschool educational services. The recommendations in this report support the maintenance and expansion of community-based programs while also acknowledging the increased role that local boards of education must play in providing needed access, developing a professional workforce and accounting for the student progress the state expects as a result of its investment.

Similarly, this report recognizes that many families may elect to provide the expected preschool education at home. These families should be supported and encouraged to take advantage of public resources to enable and supplement their efforts.

While this report encourages a minimum of 2½ hours per day for all children, access to such limited preschool education services alone may not be adequate for many children to meet the learning objectives set by the state. In communities where the long-term effects of poverty, poor health and other conditions cause developmental delays in large numbers



of children, additional services, such as those offered in School Readiness Grant Programs and Head Start, must continue to be available. This report acknowledges the continuing need for these supplemental programs and suggests extending these services to eligible children in communities beyond those currently served.

Another highly effective asset that has been cultivated in Connecticut over the past seven years is local School Readiness Councils. School Readiness Councils have coordinated dialogue among providers and funders of services in local communities. They have gained experience in and assumed responsibility for allocating resources among eligible entities, including local public schools. The capacity of the state and local grantees to have

access to guidance from a cross-section of local preschool education interest groups has strengthened local initiatives and galvanized state and local support for increasing preschool access and maintaining program quality. This report encourages the State Department of Education to continue to give guidance and support, where possible, to establishing and maintaining local School Readiness Councils in each Connecticut town.

Lastly, for many families, preschool services in Connecticut have been provided in the context of child care. The state's child-care agency, the Department of Social Services, and the state's education agency, the Department of Education, have a long history of mutually supporting the comprehensive needs of children and families. Education, a priority need for young children, is strongly supported in both agencies. Further, the agencies work together to address other related needs, such as medical insurance for children and work opportunities and adult education for parents. This report assumes that the ability of these agencies and others to share funding, data and staffing resources, among other state assets, will continue, and that such collaboration requires support.



## PRESCHOOL: AN ELEMENT OF FAIRNESS

Since the landmark U.S. Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, states have been required to establish equity within their education systems. The anticipated effect of the decision and the burden on states is to eradicate the difference in student performance based on race and ethnicity. Given an equal opportunity to access affordable high-quality education, we believe all children can achieve at higher levels. Since 1954, state and federal resources have had to equalize educational opportunities and outcomes in K-12 school programs, with little regard to preschool education.

The early years of life form the foundation for every person's future. Curiosity, empathy, values development and the capacity to share also take shape before age 6. It is, therefore, in the first five years that key interventions can make dramatic improvement in children's lives while significantly reducing the need for costly, less effective interventions later. Learning is cumulative and continuous. Delaying systematic attention to the development of childhood cognition for five to seven years leads to underdevelopment of the structures necessary to support higher-level performance in school.



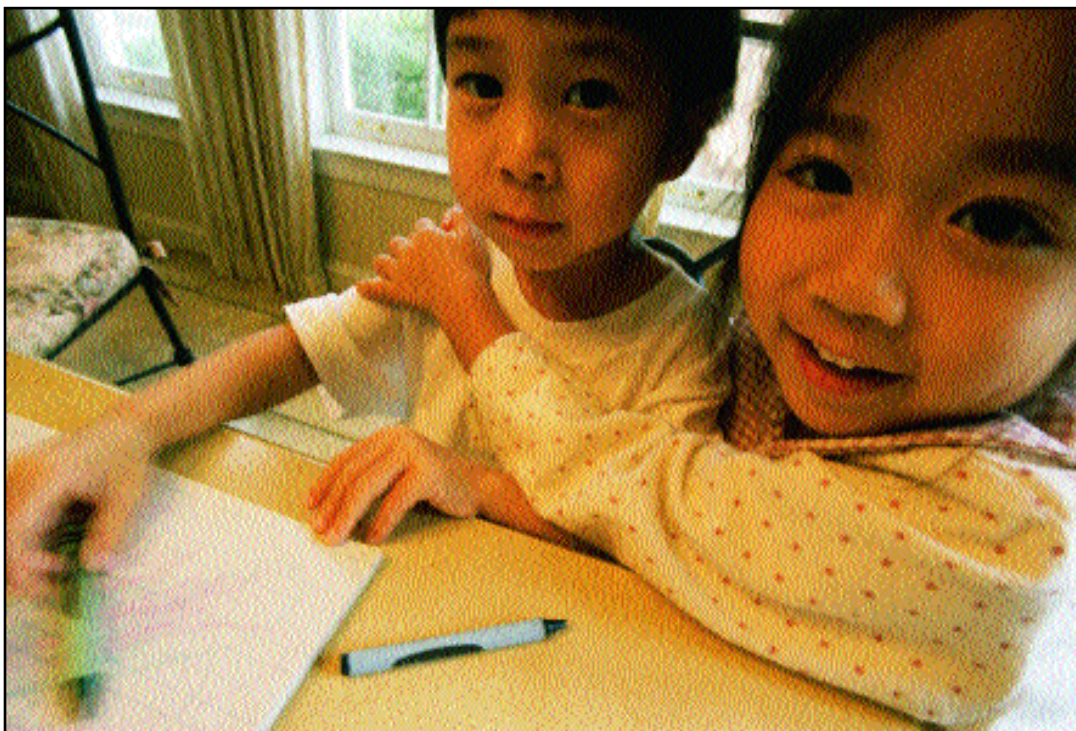
Over the past 30 years, many families have begun to actively plan for the education of their child from preschool through university. These families consciously make decisions that position children for the competitive world in which they are expected to participate. As a result, preschool programs have developed in response to the expectations of these families; their choice of programs foster knowledge and skills that were once reserved for older children. In states and communities where achievement expectations are high, children entering kindergarten without the expected competencies such programs provide are generally far behind their peers who did attend a quality preschool program. Unfortunately, they seldom catch up.

The long-term penalizing effects of being poor, an English language learner, or of a racial or ethnic minority, require that the principle of fairness be raised. This is especially true in an era when the stakes are becoming greater and negative consequences for individual students not meeting regularly assessed standards are sanctioned at the student, school and system levels. Connecticut, like the nation, has rejected the premise that an otherwise healthy child cannot learn. *Connecticut's Comprehensive Plan for*



*Education 2001-2005* “Statement of Core Beliefs” states, “Every Connecticut public school student has a fundamental right to an equal educational opportunity as defined by a free public education and a suitable program of educational experiences.” Students in the demographic groups listed above too often lack preschool experiences. The education of these children is too often delayed and their opportunities for success are diminished when compared with those of their peers who do attend high-quality preschool programs.

In Connecticut, most families bear the personal burden of finding and paying for preschool education. The state’s most economically disadvantaged children are afforded preschool services through programs that are subsidized by the state and federal government. A great number of children in Connecticut do not participate in preschool programs because (1) there is not enough funding to establish spaces for all eligible children who need services; (2) private program tuitions are more than many low-income working class families can afford; and (3) there is a lack of open preschool spaces in most communities. We do acknowledge that some undetermined number of Connecticut families may choose not to use center-based services.



The chart below presents the average weekly cost for child care in Connecticut by the Department of Education's Education Reference Groups.

### FULL-TIME AVERAGE COST FOR PRESCHOOL CHILD CARE BY SDE EDUCATION REFERENCE GROUPS

<u>Education Reference Group</u>	<u>Average Weekly Cost*</u>
<b>Group A</b> (does not include Regional School District 9) . . . . .	<b>\$196.06</b>
<b>Group B</b> (does not include Regional School District 5) . . . . .	<b>\$175.92</b>
<b>Group C</b> (does not include Regional School Districts) . . . . .	<b>\$142.87</b>
<b>Group D</b> (does not include Regional School District 12) . . . . .	<b>\$153.22</b>
<b>Group E</b> (does not include Regional School Districts or Woodstock Academy) . . . . .	<b>\$140.23</b>
<b>Group F</b> . . . . .	<b>\$144.47</b>
<b>Group G</b> (does not include Gilbert Academy) . . . . .	<b>\$133.89</b>
<b>Group H</b> (does not include Norwich Free Academy) . . . . .	<b>\$164.89</b>
<b>Group I</b> . . . . .	<b>\$147.04</b>

\* Cost information is self-reported and not provided by all programs.  
Cost information does not include state or federally subsidized programs.  
Prepared by 2-1-1 Child Care Infoline

*Note: The state's 166 school districts and 3 academies have been divided into 9 Education Reference Groups (ERGs), based on socioeconomic status, indicators of need and enrollment. ERG A is the wealthiest; ERG I is the poorest.*

The business community and public policy experts have also come to see preschool as having a significant economic impact on labor-force productivity and in the quality of the workforce. They have recognized the studies that show immediate and long-term savings to educational systems and to society.

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*"Businesses are the number one consumers of the education system. If we are to believe all the studies that consistently show that investment in early education is so critical, then we, as business leaders, need to invest in our children."*

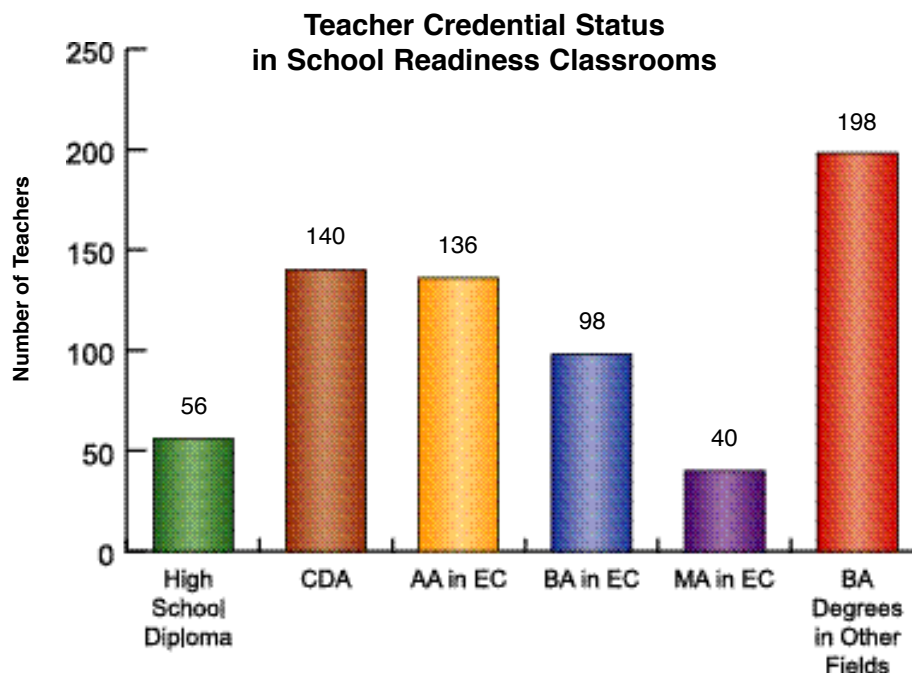
Roy Bostock, Chairman, Committee for Economic Development

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## DEVELOPING THE PROFESSION: A CRITICAL NEED

The knowledge and skills of teachers are critical factors in determining how much a young child learns. Numerous researchers have recognized that what early childhood teachers know and are able to do will have a major influence on children's learning and development. Graduates of teacher education programs drop out of teaching less frequently than teachers without a preservice professional educational experience. A college degree with specialized education in child development and education of young children makes a positive difference in children's readiness and teacher sustainability.

In Connecticut, the School Readiness Program demonstrates that many more teachers with a college degree and specialized training will be needed. The chart below shows that of 668 teachers employed in programs supported by state School Readiness funds during 2001-02, 138 or 21 percent have at least a four-year college degree with specialized early childhood training (BA or MA in early childhood).



Paraprofessionals are an integral part of the preschool workforce. Additional resources must be devoted to attracting, developing and maintaining a qualified staffing profile to meet each program's service design.

## THE “PREPARATION GAP”



The growing consensus regarding the importance of early education stands in stark contrast to the system of disparate types of care and education available to children in the preschool years. In Connecticut, a variety of preschool programs such as Head Start, School Readiness, public schools, nursery schools and state-funded day-care centers, as well as a host of private preschool programs, faith-based day-care centers, licensed and unlicensed family-day care homes, and families, provide care and education for 75 percent of Connecticut's 3- and 4-year-old children. These programs and settings differ widely in quality and standards. Such early disparity in the quality of childhood preparation contributes to the achievement gaps among students in later grades.

Many reports have documented the achievement gaps among Connecticut's students. While Connecticut ranks high in the country on National Assessment of Educational Progress tests of reading, writing and mathematics in Grades 4, 6 and 8 (U.S. Department of Education, 2003), the gap between children in wealthier towns and poor communities has widened. At least part of that gap can be traced to the wide disparity in the availability of quality early learning experiences for children before they enter school.

Most families with children under the age of 6 are in the workforce. We know that only some of these children receive quality care — meaning care that supports good child development practice and the development of important early cognition, especially language skills and positive socialization. The costs to poor students and their immediate and sustained educational opportunities due to this gap are just beginning to be understood.

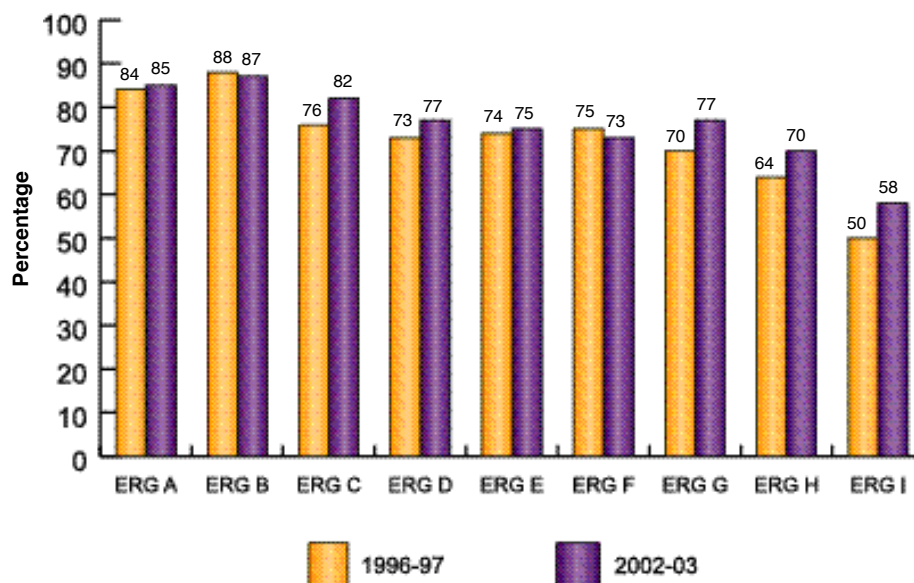
Growing concern about this “preparation gap” has led Connecticut to invest in the School Readiness program, which was a model for the nation at the time of its passage in 1997. The legislation was designed to increase the supply of affordable, high-quality preschool programs, particularly in areas of high poverty. This significant legislative effort continues to allow nearly 6,300 children in Connecticut's Priority and Severe-Need School Districts to participate in preschool programs. In addition, the state- and



federally funded Head Start program serves approximately 6,500 preschool-age children statewide who live in poor families. Many school districts are now providing some form of preschool programming to children as part of “reverse mainstream” special education designs. At the time of the School Readiness bill’s passage, it was the intent of the legislature to annually add to the state’s investment so that in five years all preschool children in Priority School Districts would have access to preschool education.

Despite these gains, disparities continue among Connecticut’s communities as represented by the number of children who come to kindergarten without a preschool experience. For example, in the 2002-03 school year, the average percentage of children who attended a preschool in the municipalities that make up Education Reference Group (ERG) A was 85 percent, while in Education Reference Group I the average percentage was 58 percent. The charts below show the ongoing disparity that exists between Connecticut’s Education Reference Groups. Chart I presents a comparison of the percentage of children in kindergarten with a preschool experience (1996-97 and 2002-03). Chart II shows the growth trends, and contrasts the disparity that exists between towns in ERGs A and B with ERGs H and I on percentage of children with a preschool experience.

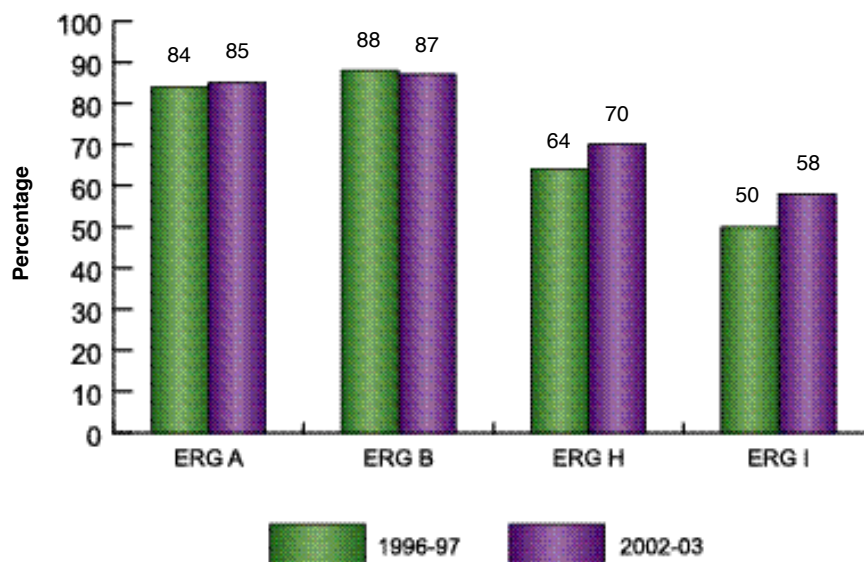
**CHART I**  
**Percentage of Kindergarten Children with**  
**Preschool Experience by Education Reference Group**  
**School Years 1996-97 and 2002-03**



*Note: The state’s 166 school districts and 3 academies have been divided into 9 Education Reference Groups (ERGs), based on socioeconomic status, indicators of need and enrollment. ERG A is the wealthiest; ERG I is the poorest.*



**CHART II**  
**Percentage of Children with Preschool Experience**  
**Comparison of Education Reference Groups A and B versus ERG H and I**



Clearly, more needs to be done to begin to close the gap, especially given the mounting evidence of both the long- and short-term costs of school unreadiness in loss of human potential and educational opportunity.

## LANGUAGE AND PRELITERACY: AN IMPERATIVE



Experts agree that language and its successor, literacy development, play an important role in general child development and a specific role in learning to learn. The intricate relationship between language and literacy begins before preschool and evolves toward increasing refinement and specificity through the preschool, elementary and middle grade years. Underdeveloped language skills affect learning to read. As children grow older, reading skills are required to support learning in every subject area.

During the preschool years, experts agree that the opportunities listed below are essential to foster strong language and preliteracy skills in children.

- Have more than 1000 hours of experiences with books, alphabet games, storybook reading and activities (Cunningham and Allington, 1994)
- Understand how to handle books and know that print moves left to right
- Enjoy books and language, and see the purpose of reading (Adams, 1990)
- Have been included in conversation and treated as a successful speaker and listener
- Have engaged in playtime that employs symbols (acting out roles, designing stories and using props)
- Have been exposed to print and writing in daily life (Schickendanz, 1988)
- Have been read to by an adult who supports the child's view and creativity during reading aloud activities

As a result of their preschool experience, children are forming oral language competencies that will be essential for learning to read and write. Many children who do not receive a quality preschool experience typically demonstrate oral language weaknesses and patterns that create later problems in reading and writing (National Research Council, 2001). The "preparation gap" is readily identifiable by and perceptible to kindergarten teachers.



## LESSONS LEARNED IN CONNECTICUT

The cost of school failure is staggering. Retention in kindergarten and first grade because children lack basic language and socialization skills takes an enormous toll on both families and school systems. Special education costs resulting from developmental delays are far higher in systems where children enter school without early education. Subsequent academic problems culminating in the failure to graduate from high school, teen pregnancy, dependency on welfare and criminal behavior are reduced through appropriate access to high-quality early learning programs.

## BUILD ON ESTABLISHED SUCCESS

As a result of the implementation of Connecticut's model School Readiness legislation, the state is a leader in the field of early childhood education. Connecticut also maintains strong programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start, and has existing public/private partnerships and community structures to support these programs. This means that we don't have to start from scratch — the foundation for a good system of early learning is in place.

### ELEMENTS OF THE SCHOOL READINESS MODEL

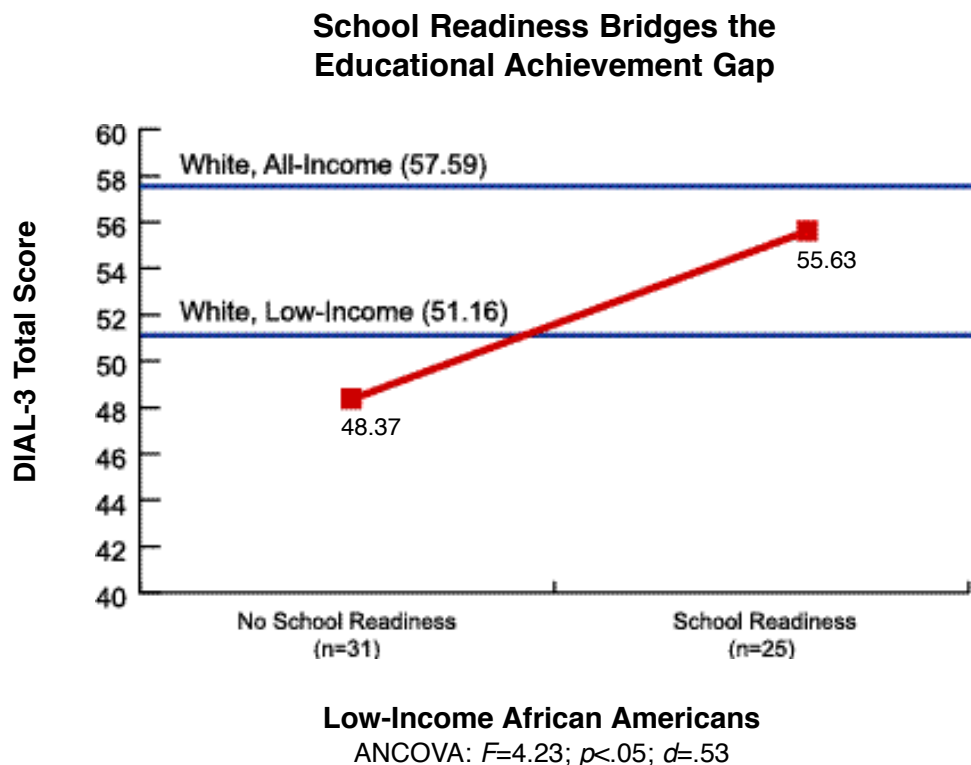
- Program standards that recognize the needs of children and their families
- Professional development for caregivers
- Licensing and accreditation that improve the sites where children spend time
- Comprehensive services that ensure childhood health and well-being necessary for learning
- Local capacity for governance and coordination
- Parent involvement
- Measurable results for all children using the *Connecticut Curricular Goals and Benchmarks for Children in Preschool Programs* and the *Preschool Assessment Framework*
- Curriculum alignment with local K-12 schools
- Financing, including family contribution, state grants and private contributions
- Facilities that support learning and permanency within communities

Quality is the key. Connecticut's School Readiness model upgrades the quality of the existing programs and ensures quality among new providers.

## FINDINGS IN CONNECTICUT COMMUNITIES STRONGLY SUPPORT QUALITY PRESCHOOL INVESTMENT

### MIDDLETOWN SCHOOL READINESS

The availability of a school readiness program accounted for a significant increase in the number of low-income African-American children “ready” for school — from 87 percent (of those who did not attend) to 96 percent (of those who did). These findings provide strong evidence that school readiness programs can help to close the education gap at kindergarten entry between white and low-income African-American children. The study, conducted in Middletown, used the results of the Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning, Third Edition (DIAL-3) to find those children at risk of school difficulties in kindergarten. The chart below shows that low-income African-American children with a school readiness experience did not statistically differ in their DIAL-3 performance from white children of all income levels. Further, there is a statistically positive effect for the African-American children who attended a school readiness program when compared to African-American children who did not attend such a program.

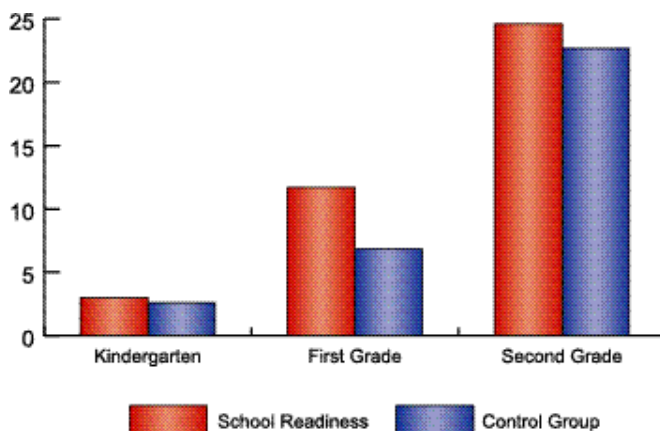


## BRIDGEPORT SCHOOL READINESS

Bridgeport followed children who had quality early care and education programs against those who did not. Children who had quality early education had fewer retentions, more frequent attendance and higher reading scores throughout Grades K-2.

In the Bridgeport study, School Readiness saved significant tax dollars in decreased retention. Retentions in K-2 cost \$622,644 for the control group and \$113,208 for the School Readiness children who were observed. School Readiness dramatically decreased retention.

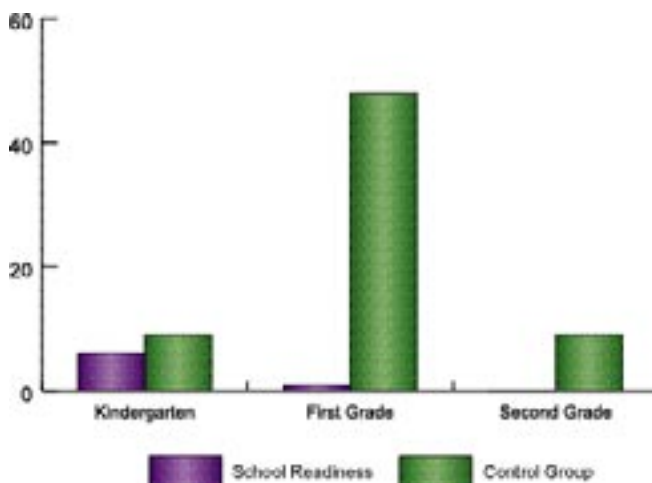
**Bridgeport Developmental Reading Assessment**



(D. Watson, "Bridgeport School Readiness Longitudinal Study," Bridgeport Public Schools, January 2002)

- Kindergarten Developmental Reading Assessment is reported in June 2001. A score of 10 is the minimum for promotion to first grade. Kindergarten children needed to be at least on level A for promotion. The scoring is A, 1, 2, 3, etc. School Readiness averaged a level 3, Control Group students averaged 2.6.
- In first grade, the School Readiness children had an average score of 11.68. The Control Group's average score was 6.84.
- In second grade, School Readiness students average 24.6 whereas the Control Group's average score was 22.68.
- The School Readiness students met the promotion standard.

**Bridgeport Retentions — Percentages**



- In kindergarten, 11/197 School Readiness children were retained (as compared to 15/176).
- In first grade, 1/88 School Readiness children were retained (as compared to 49/96).
- In second grade, 0/13 School Readiness children were retained (as compared to 2/23).

(D. Watson, "Bridgeport School Readiness Longitudinal Study," Bridgeport Public Schools, January 2002)

### MILFORD SCHOOL READINESS

An analysis in Milford schools found that children who attended a high-quality preschool program were significantly more school ready upon entry to kindergarten and more successful in school than children who did not attend the high-quality program. Children in the longitudinal study were from primarily white, middle-income backgrounds and had been previously identified as being at high risk for educational failure or having special education need.



- Children in a high-quality preschool program gained four points on language/concept tests
- Children not in a high-quality preschool program declined more than one point

(M. Kramer and C. Wheeler, "Assessing the Benefits of the Milford Public Preschool Program," 1999)

Children in the high-quality preschool program gained an average of four points (95.0 to 99.0) on age-appropriate tests in language, motor skills and concept development over the course of the preschool program. In contrast, children who did not attend a high-quality program (half of whom were in center-based care) lost developmental ground, experiencing a decline in average test scores (92.6 to 91.5) over the same period. Overall benefits included:

- **Less Special Services:** Two thirds of the students who completed the preschool program required no special services when they were in kindergarten, Grade 1 or 2.
- **Less Special Education:** Preschool participants were three times less likely to require special education during their kindergarten year.
- **Less Retention:** Children who did not attend the high-quality preschool program were over four times more likely to be retained at the end of their kindergarten year. This is compelling, as some argue that the gains in early care and education do not hold for middle class children. This showed that they did.

- **Cost Savings:** Preschool programs saved Milford approximately \$3 million over five years in reduced expenditures on outside special education tuition and transportation.

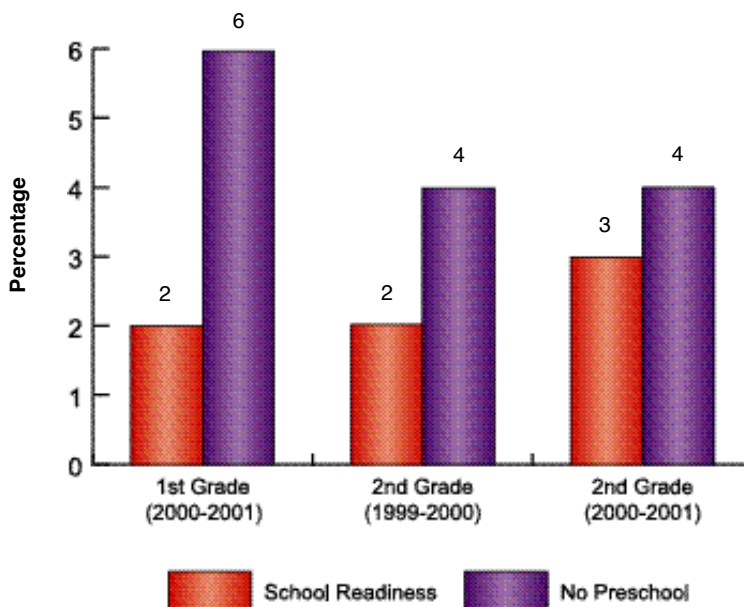
## STAMFORD SCHOOL READINESS

New results from a Stamford study show that School Readiness leads to many gains once children from such programs reach school. Children from Stamford School Readiness Programs, compared to children with no preschool background, had:

- higher reading achievement (in kindergarten, Grades 1 and 2);
- higher report card marks in many areas (in kindergarten, Grades 1 and 2);
- fewer retentions;
- higher attendance rates (in kindergarten, Grades 1 and 2); and
- fewer ESL and bilingual placements.

In the Stamford study, School Readiness students were retained much less often than students with no preschool experience.

**Percentage of Students Retained:  
Stamford Students Who Attended School Readiness vs.  
Those with No Preschool Experience**



(J. Singer, "The Stamford School Readiness Program: A Longitudinal Study," Stamford Public Schools, October 2002)



### HARTFORD/WEST HARTFORD SCHOOL READINESS

Low-income children may benefit especially from School Readiness Programs that mix children from diverse economic backgrounds. The Hartford/West Hartford study found that low-income children attending preschool with more affluent peers increased their vocabulary skills six times faster than children in classes made up entirely of low-income children. The same children almost quadrupled the rate at which they acquired new vocabulary, suggesting that low-income children benefited greatly by the language models of their middle-/upper-income peers.

After six months, the vocabulary gains made by the low-income students in mixed-income classrooms were significantly greater than the vocabulary gains of their affluent classmates and those of other low-income children.

(C. Schechter, "The Impact of Two Types of Preschool Programs on Children's Language." A presentation to the Council of Philanthropy, July 2003)



## STRATEGIC CHOICES FOR CONNECTICUT

This presentation is a work in progress. Before implementation can be considered, it will require significant elaboration and refinement. Policymakers and policy implementers will develop models for determining the cost of early childhood services that reach all 3- and 4-year-old children.

This work does, however, provide a solid foundation for a call to action so that state policymakers can make the strategic choices that will be necessary for implementing a quality system of early education for all of Connecticut's children.





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